

AIS English Conference 2009

Creative Writing for Extension 1

**Sandra Duggan
Loreto Kirribilli**

Two Approaches to Creative Writing

1. Ideas, concepts and concerns of the module itself as the focus

Gender and Language - feminism,
- backlash,
- female voice as subversion
- gender instability

After the Bomb - post-apocalyptic scenario,
- survivalism,
- espionage,
- totalitarianism,
- paranoia

2. Writing workshops - reading as a writer
- writing exercises
- drafting with a buddy

Writing Workshops: Reading as a Writer

Excerpt from 'Every Move You Make' by David Malouf (used for a course on Gendered Language)

Excerpt from 'Symbols and Signs' by Vladimir Nabokov (used for a course on After the Bomb) [Sign Language.mp3](#)

Note here the use of *The New Yorker* podcasts

- Concept?
- Sequence of Events?
- Structure?
- Focalisation?

Focus on Focalisation

You might first think about this as

- person
- narrative point of view

How is focalisation different from point-of-view? [Point of view](#) is when a story is told in the voice of a particular character.

Focalisation, on the other hand, is when an omniscient narrator is telling the whole story, but here and there, we find certain words that make sense only from the perspective of a certain character.



Writing a focalised paragraph

DO IT.

This is a draft.

We will share it as readers who are writers.

Sharing, reading, editing and rewriting

Your writing buddy will READ YOUR PIECE AS A WRITER NOT A CRITIC

- Writing buddy to begin with the strengths of the piece
- What shines?
- What is strong?
- Where does it get woolly? Unclear? Repetitive?
- Focus on LANGUAGE
- Name some of the words that sing
- Circle excessive adjectives and adverbs - suggest alternatives
- Circle repetition
- WRITING IS CUTTING! Good writing is sharp, clear, precise, shaped, sculpted
- Own your comments by putting your name to them

Showing and Telling

Fictional discourse alternates between *showing* us what happened and *telling* us what happened

Showing = dialogue / quoted speech of characters, in which language mirrors exactly the event - because the event is linguistic

Telling = in purest form is authorial summary - concision and abstraction of narration effaces the individuality of the characters and their actions

Functions:

Telling can hurry the action along, can get past unimportant detail, can let the story get from the event to the reactions to the event where the emphasis of the story and characterisation may lie.

Showing allows for audience engagement and frees readers to make their own judgements about characters and their thoughts/actions/motivations

Moving between the two alters the pace of a piece of writing and alters the focus of the reader, from skimming over what is told to emotionally engaging with what is shown.

Moving between showing and telling

1. Change of voice, from narration to character dialogue in direct speech
2. Change in narrative focalisation, from onmiscient to subjective
3. Change from abstract recount to subjective response to the event

Creative Writing

Formal Elements


1. You need an articulate and self aware main character - through this character will come your focalization
2. You need a clever structure. Consider
 - i. Framed narrative (someone telling a story to someone else)
 - ii. Double narrative - two competing versions
 - iii. Chronology manipulation - make the present and past connect
 - iv. Unreliable narrator
3. You could incorporate a couple of text forms (eg prose narration and script / letters)
4. You need to consider cultural values and context for the story - remember that the ending of a story often encapsulates the value system
5. You might consider stylistic elements such as surrealism or symbolism
6. In a short story have ONE key event that may happen outside of the text itself - before, after, or in the spaces between parts of the text.
Use the bulk of the text to reflect on the event and its meaning / its language

Formal Elements

Consider listing types of characters

Consider creating a list of imaginative recreation scenarios

Compile a list of possible plotlines

 Bradbury_Soft_Rains_1950.pdf

English Extension 1: After the Bomb Reading and Writing Exercise

'August 2026: There will come Soft Rains' by Ray
Bradbury (1950)

This story is a part of Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*, and is clearly a piece of science fiction - but more exactly operates as a piece of speculative fiction. It is obviously also an example of post-apocalyptic writing, but it is grounded in suburban materiality and exploits three very deliberate devices:

- The refrain of time passing
- The contrast between domestic busy-ness and human absence
- The inclusion of a poem that comments on the events that have occurred outside the frame of the story itself

The ideology that operates here is a bleak one about the inevitability of entropy and the transitory nature of human culture. It is scientific humanism unleavened by hope or optimism.

Reading as a Writer

1. Note down words and phrases Bradbury uses that evoke the materiality of the scene for you.
2. What do you think of the time refrain?
3. Identify the emotions you feel at the end of the story and link them to words and phrases Bradbury uses.

Writing as a Reader

1. Imagine the world as you know erased. What would remain?
2. Describe the material remains of the world as vividly and specifically as you can. Use words, phrases, paragraphs.
3. Decide how you want to position readers (angry, sad, defenceless, politicised)
4. Write a brief description of this world and incorporate audience positioning into your choice of words and creation of tone. (200 words)

Constructing a Creative Writing Booklet

1. Use your own wide reading as a guide
2. Use each of the excerpts, passages, chapters or short stories as models for different excerpts of the creative writing process.
3. Focus on some of the following:
 - Context
 - Situation
 - Plot
 - Voice
 - Character
 - Genre
 - Technique and Form
 - Objects as signs
 - Ideology
 - Purpose

Voice

John Wyndham, *The Chrysalids*, Chapter 1. Penguin Books 2008. First published 1955.

The Chrysalids is another post-nuclear apocalypse story; this one is set in a distant future of genetic mutation in a devastated world. As a whole the novel explores the ways a society polices the boundaries between the acceptable and the aberrant.

The first person narration gives readers immediate access to this world, especially since the voice is that of a child. This allows Wyndham to use innocence and naivety, where the adult reader is permitted to fill in the gaps. Even the first page means more to readers - as we interpret the 'city' David dreams of as one familiar to us rather than alien. As the novel unfolds we realise that the child's voice is also that of an outsider, someone struggling to understand the values and behaviours of the adults in his world.

As a reader

- Note down any phrases or sentences where the child's voice allows Wyndham to expose a gap between David and the dominant attitudes or beliefs of his world.

As a writer

- In note form, create a situation where the voice of the narrative (try first person) is operating from a specific point of view. Consider creating the voice from the point of view of
 - A child
 - An outsider
 - A political dissident
 - A cynical leader
 - A foreigner
 - A fringe dweller
- Write a letter using this voice to describe and understand the situation in which the character finds herself / himself. (300 words)